



# EL CERRITO POLICE DEPARTMENT

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## Critical Review of Police Responses

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Police work has many moments that are difficult to predict. The incidents that our El Cerrito officers encounter rapidly change, and an officer who thought they were dealing with a low-key non-violent incident can suddenly be faced with a dangerous threat.

A noted risk manager, Gordon Graham, has been known to say, “If it is predictable, it is preventable.” I agree with this axiom, to an extent. I say that because the nature of tragedy is often unpredictable. As an officer, I have responded to the unexpected demise of both young and old. I have seen traffic accidents end in death and serious injury. We might be able to predict some of the ways in which tragedy might befall us and those around us, but we cannot guess at them all.

Nonetheless, the ECPD tries its best to predict future tragedies and create plans to prevent them. I would like to share a specific incident as an example, to show how our ECPD officers spent time analyzing the incident and making plans for better outcomes.

At the ECPD, we have a tradition of placing ourselves and other agencies under critical review, when we see good and bad outcomes. When we achieve a good outcome, we identify the things we did that contributed to the outcome and when we have a negative outcome, we try to diagnose the actions that led to the result. This means that teams at all levels in the organization regularly have discussions and planning sessions following not just ECPD incidents but also high profile, nationally recognized tragedies. Recently, a tragedy brought national attention to the risks of a police response to excited delirium.

In September, a video of the Rochester Police arrest of Daniel Prude received significant media coverage. In the video, Mr. Prude appears to be suffering from an acute crisis. While I do not know the nature of the crisis, his behavior was consistent with a condition known as excited delirium. In the police world, excited delirium is a phrase police and medical staff use to describe someone who is in a state characterized by agitation, aggression, acute distress, and sudden death. Some of the observable indications of excited delirium can be disrobing, mania, high temperature, sweating, violence, and resistive behavior. Often, drug use can be a contributing factor.

In Rochester, the police and medical response was not able to preserve Mr. Prude’s life. At the El Cerrito Police Department, when we see a tragedy like this, we resist the urge to think, “That cannot happen here.” Instead, we ask ourselves, “How could that happen here? What preparation have we done to prevent a similar outcome?” We frequently review our response procedures with our officers for incidents involving excited delirium. This was an opportunity for us to do so again.

*“We protect our community, solve crime and pursue justice.”*

Our officers refreshed their plans for excited delirium responses. Our top priorities:

- Assess the medical condition of a subject and begin an emergency medical response by paramedics.
- Move quickly to remove a detained person from the ground and into a comfortable, resting position.
- Closely monitor the well-being of the person and be ready for life saving intervention.

It was not long before our officers put their preparation into action. On September 14, our officers responded to a call of a carjacking. In the incident, the suspect entered a motorist's vehicle and tried to take control of the car. Our officers responded to the area of San Pablo Ave. and Waldo Ave. after callers reported that the suspect fled the car and was now on the center median.

An ECPD traffic officer was the first responder on scene. He found the man exhibiting agitation, signs of delirium, and sweating profusely. When contacted, the man complied with the officer's commands. The officer ordered the man to lay down and then handcuffed him on the ground. With the help of other responding officers, the traffic officer quickly moved the man off the ground and placed him in the rear of a patrol vehicle. Collectively, the officers recognized that the man appeared to be exhibiting signs of excited delirium. They requested a priority emergency medical response. An officer positioned herself at the open window of the vehicle to monitor the man for additional signs of distress. The monitoring officer turned up the vehicle's air conditioning to help keep the man cool. In the process, officers learned that the man was on parole and had ingested a large amount of an illegal drug.

When the ambulance arrived, officers told the paramedics about the urgency of his physical distress. They helped the paramedics secure the man for transport to the hospital. Within about 6 and a half minutes from the time officers first arrived at the scene, paramedics were assisting the man. Ultimately, the man survived his overdose.

Our officers' training and preparation played a big role in the successful outcome of this incident. While their preparation does not guarantee that a tragedy will not occur, our officers undertook a number of actions to reduce the possibility that the man would die during our intervention. We can control some variables in a situation like this, but we cannot control them all. We could not control whether the man would consume a dangerous amount of a controlled substance. He may very well have died, even after our officers did everything they could to prevent that outcome.

Law enforcement has a long history of looking at tragedies from around the nation and conducting after action reviews. The first barrier that stands in the way of getting real value from these reviews, however, is acknowledging that tragedies can happen in all our jurisdictions. The ECPD will continue to reflect on the outcomes of such incidents, recognize the unpredictability of situations we may face, and apply what we have learned. Our officers will continue to diligently prepare for these incidents, to minimize the harm to our communities.