

CHIEF CLEARS TASER COPS BEFORE IA INVESTIGATION

The criminal and administrative investigations into what happened when a anti-pesticide protester was tasered May 30 are nowhere near complete. But that didn't stop Eugene Police Chief Robert Lehner from apparently exonerating the officers even before his Internal Affairs (IA) investigators had interviewed civilian witnesses, a dozen of whom have alleged unjustified police brutality and arrests.

Lehner sent an email to the mayor and City Council June 2 proclaiming that Taser victim Ian Van Ornum "refused" officer orders to get out of the street and "immediately began resisting arrest and fighting." Van Ornum "successfully fought free from the arresting officer at a point when he had only one handcuff on, swinging the other cuff wildly," Lehner claimed. "Recognizing the dangerous situation," an officer warned Van Ornum to stop or be Tased. Lehner alleged, "Van Ornum did not stop and was taken into custody with the aid of a Taser."

Lehner's account largely repeats a May 30 press release from EPD but adds additional details and new charges against protesters. Lehner alleges that while officers were arresting Van Ornum, there were "two additional persons who began physically attacking the officers."

The press release states that protester "David Alexander Owen, ran at the officers in an attempt to interfere with the arrest, while another, Anthony Jameson Farley, swung his fists at the officers." The press release states that Farley was charged with assault.

Owen was charged with interfering with police, disorderly conduct and resisting arrest, but there's no mention in the press release of him allegedly "physically attacking" officers, as Lehner alleged in his email.

In an email to the mayor and council, Owen said that Lehner's charge that he was "physically attacking" officers "is a complete fabrication." Noting the press release reported in the media, Owen wrote, "I doubt that any policeman is claiming that I attacked them, only that I ran toward their general area."

Owen said that what really happened was that he "stood 10 feet from the police and, witnessing their excessive force ... asked in civil manner 'Why are you hurting him so much?'" After the question, an "aggressive" officer "charged toward me, pulled my arm behind my back and then slammed me to the ground where I hit my head and was knocked unconscious," Owen alleged.

Numerous other witnesses at the event have alleged that Van Ornum was not resisting arrest or blocking traffic and was Tasered and assaulted by police while already subdued without justification.

Police initially had said they expected their IA investigation to be completed by the end of August with a recommendation sent to Lehner.

Under the new process set up by a recent ballot measure, the independent police auditor could make a recommendation on that recommendation. Lehner would then make a final determination on any misconduct or discipline, although his June 2 email appears to indicate he's already made up his mind. After Lehner announces his final adjudication, the Civilian Review Board could comment on the case and investigation, but that won't change the outcome.

But the whole investigation appears likely to be delayed by District Attorney Doug Harclerod's announcement June 16 that he's investigating the May 30 incident.

The *Register-Guard* reported that Harclerod is investigating the protesters for criminal charges but not the police.

But Lehner emailed the mayor and council June 16 stating that Harclerod "intends to review the entire matter for potential criminal prosecution" apparently including "the excessive force claims against the police." Lehner said the department's policy is to delay any administrative investigation of officer misconduct until after criminal cases against involved officers and/or civilians are completed.

In past cases, that has delayed IA investigations by months. — Alan Pittman

ACLU SEEKS TASER LIMITS

A new letter to *EW* from the Oregon ACLU this week calls for strict limits on the use of electronic Taser weapons by the Eugene Police Department. The statement reconfirms an earlier position by the ACLU that "Tasers be used only in those situations that are most likely to otherwise lead to the use of deadly force."

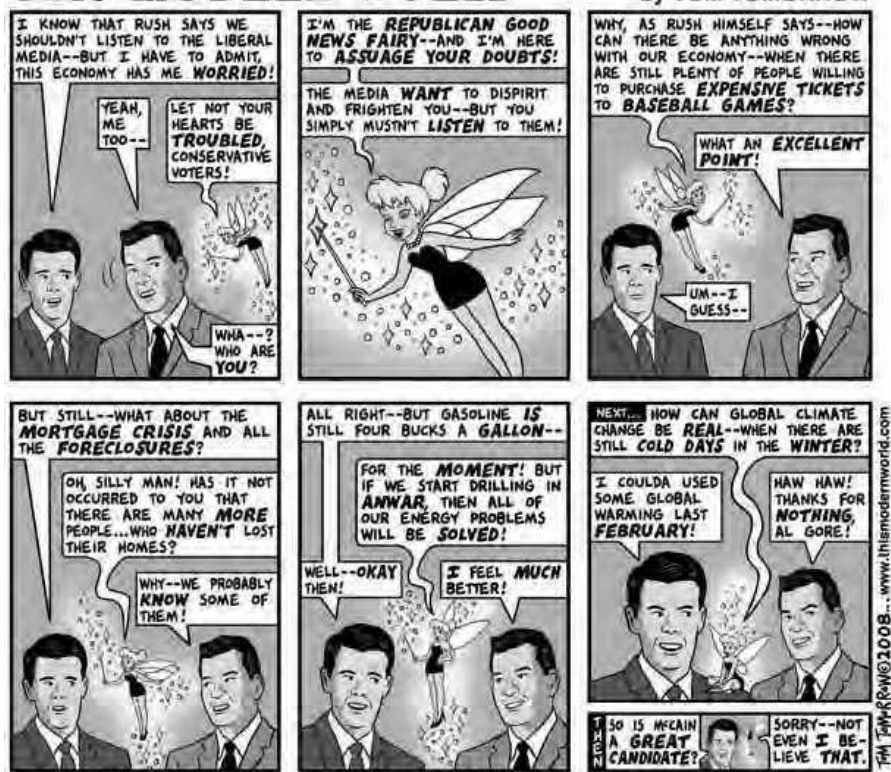
The letter from David Fidanque and Claire Syrett of ACLU refers to the recent use of Tasers by the EPD on Ian Van Ornum during a peaceful political demonstration May 30.

"We wish to dispel any misperception that ACLU endorsed the current EPD Taser policy," reads the letter. "To the contrary, we offered strong criticism of those parts of the policy that permit the use of Tasers to gain compliance in the course of taking a person into custody."

The ACLU notes that the use of Tasers has been implicated in more than 250 unintended deaths nationwide, and "While the Police Commission and Chief Lehner adopted some of the ACLU's recommendations last fall, the current policy allows the use of Tasers in situations where there is no threat to public safety and little threat to police officers." See the entire letter at www.eugeneweekly.com

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



news Briefs

OLYMPIC TRIALS (IN)SECURITY?

With seats for 15,000 spectators at Hayward Field and another 10,000 people expected to show up for the Eugene '08 Festival outside the Trials, people are starting to wonder how everyone is going to get in without waiting in lines for hours.

According to the event's media relations liaison, Rita Radostitz, there will be three entrances total for the combined events. Each entrance will have from six to eight metal detectors. "If there is a bigger crowd, more can be added," Radostitz said. But she added, "Really, we don't expect there will be long lines." The almost 1,000 athletes and another 1,000 or so members of the press will arrive through a separate entrance.

Capt. Chuck Tilby of the Eugene Police Department is chair of the security committee. He said he was unable to discuss many of the security measures that will be taken by the combined efforts of the local, state and federal agencies including the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Justice and "most of the three-letter government agencies."

Members of EPD will be working overtime at the event, and Securitas Security Services USA, which calls itself "the largest security provider in the world," has been running ads in the *R-G* advertising that it "is currently hiring corporate security officers for the Olympic Trials in Eugene." Neither Tilby nor Radostitz were aware of the Securitas hires. Securitas had not returned



EW's call to its offices by press time.

Tilby said the most noticeable aspect of the security measures at the Trials will be the metal detectors. Such measures "always slow things down a little," but "it's one of our goals to not have people standing in long lines," he said. He said he plans for the lines to be "better than you see at the airport."

Tilby and Radostitz both emphasize that they hope people will be aware of what they can or cannot bring to the Olympic Trials. The only items that will be allowed in are: clothes, cameras without large telephoto lenses, cushions without backs, empty water bottles and plastic tubes containing sunscreen, ointment, etc., as well as a small soft-sided bag. Spectators can fill their empty water bottles at one of five locations inside the venue. — Camilla Mortensen

FUND SUPPORTS ATTACK VICTIM

Residents of the Trainsong Neighborhood have set up a support fund for their neighbor who was brutally attacked early Monday, June 9. Contributions can be made to: Our Neighbors Support Fund, SELCO Community Credit Union, P.O. Box 7487, Eugene 97401, or any SELCO branch.

About two dozen community members from throughout Eugene, working with the Stop Hate Campaign, distributed 350 leaflets in the Trainsong Neighborhood June 13. The leaflets provided information about the attack and contact information for the Stop Hate Campaign, the Eugene Human Rights Commission and local law enforcement. Two men have been arrested in an investigation of the incident, but it has not been determined whether the beating of the black man was racially motivated.

"The purpose of the leafletting was to let Trainsong neighbors know that the broader community stands with them and to send the message that we won't allow hate to take over our town," says Michael Carrigan of Community Alliance of Lane County.