

# Chief sternly responds to public abuse over dog shooting

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SALT LAKE CITY — Saying that he hasn't seen this type of public outcry for human beings that are shot, a passionate Salt Lake Police Chief Chris Burbank responded Friday to those who have disrespected and threatened his officers after one officer shot and killed a dog.

Burbank told a group of reporters that he was "extremely disappointed" with the hate mail and verbal abuse his department has received since an officer shot Sean Kendall's dog, Geist, in its own backyard during a search for a missing child. Several longtime reporters noted that Friday's press conference was the angriest they had ever seen Burbank.

"I absolutely demand that every single one of my officers treat the public with the respect and dignity they deserve. My officer, and officers, deserve no less," he said sternly.

On Friday, Burbank identified the officer who shot Geist as detective Brett Olsen, one of the decorated heroes who brought the Trolley Square shooting spree to an end in 2007.

Burbank said he can't, and won't, get into the details yet of what transpired in Kendall's backyard, saying it would be "irresponsible" of him to do so before the internal investigation is completed." But he noted that "evidence shows the dog was extremely close. We do have documentation."

On June 18, police were looking for a missing 3-year-old in the area of 2500 South and 1500 East, when Olsen happened upon Kendall's house while going door to door. When no one answered the front door, Olsen went into the fenced backyard, where the confrontation with Geist took place.

"I verbalize this with every single officer that sits in my office: 'I ask you to do what you believe is right given the circumstances that face you.' Now, doing what's right given the circumstances that faces anyone does not always result in the best outcome of a situation. But we can't ask much more of a police officer.

"This is an unfortunate circumstance where a family pet, where Geist, was killed. It is not the intention of any police officer to go out and conduct business in this manner," Burbank said.

The chief asked the public to think about what the outcry would have been if his officers didn't go into yards to look for the child, who was reported as being nonverbal and would not respond to his name being called. He said unfortunately, his department has received a lot of training in recent years and practice in searching for missing children due to the several high-profile cases that ended with tragic results such as the Destiny Norton case.

The 5-year-old girl was missing for eight days in 2006 before police found her body stuffed in plastic storage box in a neighbor's cellar.

"It is our responsibility that we do all we can to bring a safe resolution to the circumstances we encounter. This is a seasoned officer who has tremendous experience and has, in fact, been under fire and performed very well," Burbank said of Olsen. "I cannot in my mind imagine an officer coming forward and saying we didn't do all we could to find a missing child."

The chief said he was not trying to minimize what happened to dog. But the threats of violence and verbal abuse against his officers needed to stop.

Burbank read a couple of the letters his office has received. One person wrote that they would shoot Olsen if they could. Other officers have been verbally abused on the street, while some officers have had their home phone numbers and addresses posted on social media sites. Just as he was about to begin the press conference, Burbank said he ran into another officer named Olsen who has received much of the hate mail simply because of his last name.

While Burbank says he welcomes protest — noting that he had personally received praise for the way he handled the protest of environmental activist Tim DeChristopher and the Occupy Salt Lake movement — he will not stand

for his officers being threatened or disrespected. Treating people with dignity is a two-way street, he said.

Protests are fine as long as they are done peacefully and with respect, Burbank said. The recent flood of hate mail his office has received has been "undeserving."

"Absolutely the police department is going to go forward with an investigation. Individuals will be held accountable for their actions as they always are, not held accountable to this ridiculousness."

Burbank also received a letter from the Salt Lake City Council that called for him to publicly explain how searches of property are conducted and asked that the department's investigations into the shooting "be thorough and deliberate."

The process of conducting an internal review will take about a month. Burbank stressed that the department is committed to "doing business appropriately." He said not only would Olsen's actions be reviewed, but department policies as well.

A Facebook page titled [Justice for Geist](#) had attracted more than 30,000 followers as of Friday. The group has a rally scheduled for Saturday outside the Salt Lake City Public Safety Building.

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