

Police department to get more body cameras following shooting

NORTH CHARLESTON, S.C. — The mayor of North Charleston announced Wednesday that all the town's police officers will wear body cameras.

The decision came after a white officer was filmed shooting an unarmed black man over the weekend.

North Charleston Mayor Keith Summey called the shooting "a horrible tragedy."

"There have been two families that have been harmed greatly by what occurred — both the victim's and the officer's family," Summey said during a news conference Wednesday. "Our hearts go out to both of them."

Officer Is Fired After Arrest

Michael Thomas Slager, a former North Charleston police officer, was arrested and charged with murder Tuesday. He has also been fired from the police force. He allegedly shot and killed Walter Scott during what began as a traffic stop over the weekend.

At first, Slager had said that Scott had taken his Taser, a weapon that delivers an electrical shock, during a confrontation Saturday morning. Video footage released Tuesday showed that Scott, who was 50, appeared to be unarmed when he ran away.

The cellphone video of the shooting was taken by a person standing nearby, who later turned it over to Walter Scott's family. In the video, Slager, 33, is seen firing repeatedly at Scott's back. According to the criminal charges, Slager struck him "multiple" times.

North Charleston Police Chief Eddie Driggers said Wednesday that he was "sickened" by the video.

Protestors Speak Up At News Conference

During Wednesday's news conference, protesters interrupted officials with chants of "No justice! No peace!" They demanded that the police chief answer questions about the investigation, which is being handled by the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED). The FBI has also said it is investigating.

Summey and Driggers did not answer specific questions about the shooting, saying that SLED, and not the city, is leading the investigation.

The mayor and the chief said they visited Scott's family Wednesday morning.

They are "a wonderful, down-to-earth family, a wonderful group of people, and we let them know how we felt about their loss and how bad it was," Summey said. He added that they told Scott's family that they do not ignore wrongdoing, no matter who is responsible.

"I have been praying for peace for the family and peace for the community," the police chief said.

Family Is "Relieved"

The North Charleston police department ordered additional body cameras to add to the 115 cameras it already owns. Officers will wear the small video cameras, which will record their actions. However, Summey cautioned that it could take some time before officers would wear them on patrols. The officers need to be trained and the department needs to finish writing rules for using them.

Scott's family praised the arrest Tuesday evening, and a lawyer said the family was "relieved" that charges were filed.

"All we wanted was the truth, and through the process we've received the truth," said Anthony Scott, Walter Scott's brother. "I don't think that all police officers are bad cops, but there are some bad ones out there."

This was the 11th time an officer has shot someone in South Carolina this year, said Thom Berry, a SLED spokesman.

Justice For All

On Wednesday, a few dozen protesters showed up outside the North Charleston city building.

"We're out here for justice, we're out here because black lives matter," said Jeremy Johnson, 21.

Johnson said he was upset, but not surprised, by the video showing Scott's killing.

"This is not just about justice for Charleston. It's about justice for Mike Brown, it's about justice for Eric Garner," Johnson said. "It's about justice everyone."

Michael Brown was an unarmed black teen in Ferguson, Missouri, who was killed by a white police officer over the summer. Eric Garner, another unarmed black man, died in New York City after a white police officer put him in a chokehold during an arrest. Both deaths set off protests across the country and began a discussion over how white police officers treat black people.

Part Of A Bigger Problem

In North Charleston, the protesters insisted that Scott's shooting was a symptom of bigger problems in local policing. However, they insisted that demonstrations must remain peaceful.

"The system is our enemy — not these individual officers," said Pastor Thomas Ravenell. "We cannot change the law by breaking the law."

Former South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford, who is now a United States congressman, stopped by the protest. He said there was no way to defend the killing.

Sanford said it was too soon to discuss policing reform and use of body cameras throughout South Carolina. However, he praised local officials for swiftly charging the officer with murder.

"As the mayor said, right is right and wrong is wrong," Sanford said. "We all live with the decisions that we make, and so will this officer."