

Lewiston police chief mum about accident

Two officers injured when gun goes off at station

Ralph Bartholdt/Lewiston Tribune

The Lewiston Police Department and the city of Lewiston will not release the names of two officers injured in the accidental discharge of a firearm at the police department last month - or any details surrounding the incident.

Citing privacy issues, the department and the city denied public information requests filed by the Lewiston Tribune to release the information.

Lewiston Police Chief Chris Ankeny said the accidental discharge was the result of a policy violation and that the incident was still under investigation.

"To discuss the outcome of the investigation before we have the opportunity to review what actually happened, we're not at liberty to discuss it," Ankeny said. "A policy violation occurred during a training exercise."

The gunshot report Oct. 21 in the basement of the police department resulted in the injury of two police officers who were transported to the St. Joseph Regional Medical Center emergency room for treatment and later released with minor hand injuries.

The incident at about 4:30 p.m. happened in the department's special weapons and tactics team room in the lower level of the department following a training exercise. Immediately following the incident, the department said in a news release that the matter was a personnel issue and would be investigated.

Once the investigation, which may take two weeks, is concluded the case will be reviewed and preventative measures will be considered, Ankeny said.

"We'll determine what we can do as an agency to mitigate future incidents from happening," Ankeny said.

The incident will be logged in the officers' personnel file and will remain sealed from public scrutiny, he said.

Although the discharge of the handgun involved two city employees and occurred in a public building, Ankeny said it will be regarded as a private work-related issue.

"It is being treated as any other personnel matter," he said.

Lewiston City Attorney Jana Gomez said the newspaper's two public records requests were denied because the names of the officers requested were contained in a private personnel record.

City Manager Jim Bennett, in a letter, said "the information that you seek is not a 'public record' or 'writing,' as defined by (Idaho Code)." In addition, Bennett said the matter is under investigation and exempt from disclosure under federal and state law and, per state code, releasing the information requested would constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy.

Although it first appeared that the shot occurred while a firearm was being cleaned, Ankeny said after the incident that the officer may have been attempting to clear the firearm of ammunition when it discharged.

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