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Sheriff Claims Officer Justified in DUI Shooting

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FAIR OAKS, CA - An incident over the weekend in which a Sacramento County sheriff's sergeant shot and killed a man was "clearly an in-policy shooting," Sacramento County Sheriff John McGinness said after looking at video shot from the officer's car. At a news conference late Monday morning, McGinness said the video from the camera mounted on the officer's dashboard shows the officer approaching the suspect, John L. Savalin, Saturday in his car on Bridge Street north of the American River in Fair Oaks and talking to him. The officer was responding to a citizen's call of a man who appeared intoxicated attempting to

drive. McGinness said the tone of the initial conversation between Savalin and the officer was cordial, then escalated. Savalin's car then rolled backward. The sergeant then got in front of the car and McGinness said Savalin began to rev his engine. The sergeant tried to get Savalin to stop, McGinness said, but the driver spun his tires and then accelerated toward the sergeant. At that point, the sergeant fired a shot through the windshield of the car. The sergeant fired a total of six rounds, hitting Savalin three times in the upper torso. All the wounds entered from the front or side, said McGinness. According to McGinness, Savalin's brother-in-law, who was in the car with Savalin said the two had split a bottle of vodka and drank some beer earlier that afternoon. State DMV and Sacramento County court records show Savalin has been convicted of driving under the influence at least three times, with another DUI charge dismissed. Savalin was convicted of misdemeanor DUI charges in 1990, 2001 and 2005, according to those records. McGinness said he could not release the video because it is part of the on-going investigation. The officer, a 13-year department veteran, was placed on administrative leave, which is standard in all officer-involved shootings. The incident is under investigation, and the district attorney will determine whether criminal charges will be filed. **Savalin's Family Questions Use of Deadly Force** Robert Strong, Savalin's brother-in-law, was riding in the passenger side seat when the shooting occurred and claims the officer's life was not in danger. "In no danger at all. John didn't try to swerve to hit him, he couldn't hit him, John just wanted to get out," said Strong. Strong said he believes Savalin made a split-second decision to flee after telling the officer that he was driving with a suspended license. "I couldn't believe it. All the sudden, he revved up the engine and slammed it in drive, smashed into the police car," added Strong. John Savalin has been previously convicted of drunk driving three times. Family members also said that several of his cars had been impounded in the past and Savalin was apparently trying to avoid that from happening again. Savalin, a Fair Oaks native, was married with two children ages 12 and 14. Strong stated that his family wants to conduct its own investigation into the shooting. "I was in the car, too. I was put at risk, too. So I thought it was needless, wreckless use of a very violent weapon," Strong said.

News10/KXTV

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