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Standoff ends in suicide

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Article Text:

A Somerset man died Thursday morning from a self-inflicted gunshot wound after a police standoff at his Main Street home.

He killed himself just days before he was to be arraigned on rape charges.

Somerset Borough police Chief Randy Cox said a dispute led Douglas Higgins, 28, to barricade himself inside the master bedroom of the apartment he shared with his wife inside the Law and Finance Building along West Main Street. Police responded around 10:42 p.m. Wednesday.

"Mr. Higgins had become involved in a familial dispute and retreated from the living area into the master bedroom and made the threat he was going to shoot himself," Cox said.

Police attempted to negotiate with Higgins for several hours. Around 1:30 a.m., police heard a single gunshot and forced their way into the room.

"They found Mr. Higgins with a gunshot wound to his head," Cox said.

Higgins was flown to Memorial Medical Center, Johnstown, where he died at 8:10 a.m. in the intensive care unit.

Cambria County Coroner Dennis Kwiatkowski ruled the death a suicide. Higgins died of a single gunshot wound from a .22-caliber gun, Kwiatkowski said.

A SWAT team was requested, but was not used, Cox said. One member had arrived. State police and the Somerset Volunteer Fire Department also assisted at the scene.

Higgins was a suspect in two criminal cases. He was set to be arraigned Tuesday on rape, statutory sexual assault, sexual assault, aggravated indecent assault and indecent assault charges. State police said Higgins raped a teenage girl 15 times between Dec. 26, 2005, and May 8, 2006, at a Jennerstown home while the girl's mother was working. Higgins denied the allegations when interviewed by police, according to an affidavit.

He was also facing aggravated assault, simple assault, harassment and disorderly conduct charges stemming from an April 2007 fight. Police said Higgins had a physical altercation with Mark Lynn Boden, 38, at his residence. During the fight, Higgins bit off the tip of Boden's nose and spit it out, according to police. Charges against Boden were dropped at a preliminary hearing. Higgins' hearing in Somerset County court was continued in April.

Attorney Matthew Zatko, who was representing Higgins in the nose-biting case, was shocked by the news Thursday and said he had talked to his client earlier this week.

"We were preparing to defend those charges in the upcoming trial term," he said.

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