

# Despite de-escalation training, police shootings still on the rise in Utah

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by Cristina Flores

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(KUTV) — The State of Utah does not keep an official tally of the number of officer-involved shootings in the state.

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On top of that, the number of officer-involved shootings in Salt Lake County has doubled since 2017. The Utah Fraternal Order of Police said their records show in 2018, 24 police shootings occurred in Utah. Fourteen people were killed in those shootings.

FOP union represents about one third of the police departments — 42 of 129 — in Utah.

Salt Lake City police, Unified police and West Valley police have reportedly had the most officer-involved shootings in 2018.

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Salt Lake City police officers fired shots in four different incidents this year. One of those incidents was fatal, leading to the death of 30-year-old Cody Belgard on Friday.

The Unified Police Department had three fatal officer-involved shootings in 2018.

West Valley police had two shootings, one of them fatal.

Sgt. Brandon Shearer with Salt Lake City Police Department said his department has focused on using de-escalation tactics, where officers attempt to calm a situation or an agitated suspect without using force.



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Still, he said officers who shoot do so in response to someone else's behavior.

"Ultimately, it's the suspect's actions and reactions that cause the officer to respond," he said.

Still, he said the ACLU is concerned about the growing number of shootings — especially since they seem to occur in clusters.

This year, there was a rash of police shootings in April [and another in October](#). He said those clusters demand that shootings be scrutinized.

"Particularly for law enforcement it's a time to look at your training and procedures," he said.



Stephenson said officers have the obligation to practice de-escalation tactics because they are the ones who hold the power in interactions with the public.

***"Officers have all the power to detain, arrest, ask questions and, ultimately, take someone's life," he said.***

Police chiefs across the state are concerned about the rising number of officer-involved shootings in Utah, said Tom Ross, chief of police in Bountiful and president of the Utah Chiefs of Police Association. "This is not something we want to see," Ross said. "It's devastating to families, devastating to law enforcement."

Ross said he wants to create more dialogue about officer-involved shootings — why they happen and how to prevent them.

He said since 2014, there's been an effort in Utah to teach officers about de-escalation and emphasize that confrontations with the public should be resolved without the use of force.

Still, he said it appears to him that there's more willingness in the general community to push back against authority.

Making things more complicated, he said, is that more people who interact with police are on drugs or have mental illnesses, which can make it more difficult for police to safely de-escalate a situation.

"You can't reason with them," he said.

Ross said he believes police shootings should be scrutinized so officers can learn from them but he thinks they already are, in the local media and in investigations.

He wants the public to remember that police officers are human.

***"There's no officer that I've talked to in my career that looks forward to shooting somebody," he said.***