

Domestic violence puts cops at risk

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MONTROSE - Police officers know their lives are at risk when they go to work and, as the weekend slaying of Montrose Police Sgt. David Kinterknecht, plus the wounding of two other officers illustrates, domestic violence calls are among the most dangerous.

"Anytime police officers are called to domestic violence scenes, we take special note," Montrose Police Cmdr. Gene Lillard said. "Police officers try never to be complacent. The first thought is officer safety and survival. The most important thing is for us to go home safely."

But officers don't always go home, as the MPD, still reeling from Kinterknecht's death, knows too well.

Kinterknecht, a decorated officer with more than 20 years' experience, was killed late Saturday at an upscale home near Cobble Creek, owned by Dennis and Pam Gurney. Police say he and officers Larry Witte and Rodney Ragsdale were shot by a man who had barricaded himself in his garage. Neighbors said there was a history of domestic violence at the home.

Beverly Howell, who watched the incident from her kitchen window, told the Daily Press in a story published online Sunday Mrs. Gurney had sought her help in the past over her husband's alleged abuse. "She came screaming, saying, 'Help, help; he's after me,'" Howell said, recounting an incident some months ago.

"It was," she said of the shooting, "just terrible it ended up with two people dead."

Becky Ela, director of Tri County Resources, said the incident tends to disprove several myths about domestic violence.

She said in general that anyone can be a domestic violence victim and it doesn't have to simply be husband-on-wife violence, nor is domestic violence limited to physical abuse.

"Another misperception is that it happens only to people who live in poverty," she said.

Saturday's incident occurred at a home worth more than half a million dollars. Police have not formally identified the shooting suspect, who also died Saturday. As of Monday, they had not released specific information about the call preceding the shooting, or many specific details about it.

According to the Montrose Combined Courts, Dennis Gurney has a lengthy history of violating protection orders that named Pam Gurney as the protected party.

According to court records, Dennis Gurney pleaded guilty in 2008 to phone obstruction and harassment. He also pleaded guilty that same year to violating three protection orders, two of which named Pam Gurney as the protected party. He was jailed briefly in 2009 after pleading guilty to yet another protection order violation.

"The alleged offender has protection orders, so why did he have access to weapons?" Ela said. "I think it's a social question that needs to be asked in light of this tragedy."

The courts confirmed at least one of Gurney's protection orders prohibited him from possessing weapons and also excluded him from liquor stores.

Ela said that despite attempts to educate the public, there is still a disconnect about what domestic violence is, and what to do about it.

"People don't think it's happening in their neighborhoods, and it is. No matter what the neighborhood looks like," she said.

People experiencing domestic violence can contact authorities, but if they are hesitant to make a report, Tri County offers free, confidential help.

"One of the big issues is, there's lots of people who want to help, but don't want to report. We honor that individual's decision to make that choice," Ela said.

She said Tri County's office is available to help victims of domestic abuse and refer them to services, including to area safe houses.

"It doesn't have to get even near the point to what it was with this family," she said.

"We know what's at stake," Lillard said of domestic violence calls. "It's a lot of emotions that are flowing. It's one of the calls that police officers are more cognizant of safety issues. They know the potential."

Lillard also said the woman at the residence where the shootings took place is considered a victim.

If you are experiencing domestic abuse, you can call Tri County at 249-2486 in Montrose; 874-4941 in Delta or 626-3777 in Ouray County.