

BREAKING NEWS

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Jury awards \$1.1 million to man bit by police dog while rescuing cat

Plaintiff sued San Mateo County Sheriff's Office for excessive force in deploying K9 in minor trespassing case.

By **ROBERT SALONGA** | rsalonga@bayareanewsgroup.com | Bay Area News Group
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HALF MOON BAY — A man who was bitten by a police dog while trying to rescue a friend's cat at a construction site two years ago was awarded \$1.1 million Tuesday by a federal civil jury, which ruled that San Mateo County Sheriff's deputies used excessive force in deploying the animal.

The Sheriff's Office was evaluating Wednesday on whether to comment on the verdict.

The jury award was issued after two days of deliberations over the case of 64-year-old Richard Earl May Jr., who entered a fenced construction site near Bloom Lane the night of New Year's Day 2015 to help his 73-year-old friend retrieve her cat Domino. The feline was heard cat meowing from inside a building on the grounds, and they could find neither security guards on site nor a reachable phone number.

So May reportedly trespassed onto the site and triggered a security alarm, which summoned deputies. May alleged in his lawsuit that Deputy Chris Laughlin and two other deputies gave Riggs commands and he first sniffed at May then attacked him after more commands. The police dog bit May's legs, causing injuries that attorney Michael Haddad said took over a year to heal.

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May was detained and questioned for trespassing on the property, but did not face any criminal charges. His lawsuit alleged that deputies literally added insult to injury by photographing May with a sticker of a German Shepherd captioned "I met Riggs," the name of the police dog.

According to the verdict filing, the jury agreed that the police actions constituted both excessive force and negligence. It awarded May \$1 million in compensatory damages for his injuries and \$100,000 in punitive damages. Laughlin and San Mateo County were listed as defendants in court records.

"This verdict sends a strong message to law enforcement that a police canine is a severe use of force that should be reserved for serious crimes, where officers are truly in immediate danger," Haddad said in a statement. "The community will not tolerate reckless use of a police canine like we saw here."

Domino the cat was successfully rescued amid all the commotion of that day.

Check back later for updates to this story.

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Robert Salonga Robert Salonga covers crime and public safety for the Bay Area News Group and is based at The Mercury News. A San Jose native, he has a bachelor's degree from UCLA and a Master's degree in journalism from the University of Maryland-College Park, but remains a Bruin at heart. His prior reporting stops include Washington, D.C., Salinas and the East Bay. He is also a middling triathlete whose sole race goal is to be upright at the end. Contact Robert at 408-920-5002.

[Follow Robert Salonga @robertsalonga](#)

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