

Washoe County deputies defend actions against RGJ photographer

By Jaclyn O'Malley, Reno Gazette-Journal

Washoe County sheriff's deputies said they cited a *Reno Gazette-Journal* photographer because he entered an active fire scene in Sun Valley without authorization and repeatedly resisted deputies' commands as they tried to confirm his media affiliation, according to statements made by officers in incident reports that were released Tuesday to the newspaper.

Tim Dunn, the *Gazette-Journal's* photo chief, was cited June 18 on suspicion of obstructing and resisting as he was trying to take photos and video of a destructive residential fire near East Fourth Avenue and Flora Way.

Last week, Dunn filed a complaint with the sheriff's office, citing excessive force was used when he was obeying deputies' commands to leave the area. He said he received scrapes to his face and hands after being taken to the ground by two deputies.

Dunn, 60, said a boot came down on his back and a deputy pushed his face in the gravel.

He said Capt. John Spencer accused him of impersonating a firefighter because he was wearing protective fire gear – yellow jacket and pants, a helmet and goggles – which is recommended to be worn by media covering wildfires. This gear is often issued to journalists by fire agencies.

But according to deputies' reports, Spencer said no one touched Dunn's face or head, and that he never accused Dunn of impersonating a firefighter. Spencer said that Dunn was asked

multiple times to stop approaching the fire area, but Dunn ignored his commands and those of deputies Ethan Blosch and Miguel Diaz.

Nevada law states it is the general policy of police to allow reporters with valid identification to pass through police lines into disaster areas after the reporter is made aware of known hazards, according to the Nevada Press Association. However, the reporters' presence must not interfere with emergency operations, and reporters should be aware of the potential for a citation, the association said.

Dunn was grabbed after he had turned to head toward a media area, and Spencer said this was because Dunn kept walking and said, "I'm leaving" when Blosch told him to stay where he was. Blosch said Dunn's "continued refusal to follow instructions and continued efforts to resist us forced us to guide him to the ground." Dunn continued to resist, wrote Blosch, who said he placed his left knee on Dunn's back and used his right leg to brace Dunn's arm against his body while he tried to handcuff him. During the takedown, Blosch tore his uniform pants and received a minor injury to his knee, he said.

"It should be noted that had Dunn simply stopped when directed by either Diaz and Blosch, my direction to the deputies would have been for them to escort Dunn to the perimeter, verify his media identification and direct him to the Fire Media Command Post," Spencer wrote.

An Aug. 1 court date was scheduled in Sparks Justice Court.

Deputies wrote in reports that firefighters initially ran to where Dunn was being taken to the ground because they thought he might have been a fellow firefighter suffering a medical condition.

"I advised Dunn that it seemed suspicious that he was dressed similar to a firefighter but had no outward markings or identification reflecting an association with the *RGJ*,"

Spencer wrote.

Dunn said he was not asked to show identification until after he was handcuffed.

Dunn said that during the takedown he was trying to protect expensive cameras, which might have caused deputies to believe he was resisting.

Spencer wrote that Diaz and Blosch each had to put one of Dunn's arms in an arm bar so he could be handcuffed. He said Diaz put the camera in Dunn's hand on the ground, while the other camera remained around Dunn's shoulder.

"Dunn clearly did not attempt to bring his arms toward his body where the camera was strapped," Spencer wrote in disputing Dunn's stating his resistance was related to protecting his cameras.