

**VOLUSIA COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
INTERNAL AFFAIRS**

REPORT OF INVESTIGATION

REPORT NUMBER: IA-16-010

PERIOD COVERED: September 8, 2016
DATE REPORTED: September 9, 2016
SUBJECT(S) NAME: Deputy Aaron Blais #7102
INVESTIGATING OFFICERS: Investigator Glen Bennett #1452

BASIS FOR INVESTIGATION:

On September 8, 2016, Deputy Aaron Blais, while assigned to front door security at the Volusia County Courthouse in Deland FL, allegedly entered and passed through, the Line Scan/X-ray security machine. The Line Scan/X-ray security machine is used to detect and prevent weapons and/or contraband from entering the courthouse and was not intended for human passage.

OFFENSES:

This investigation is relevant to an alleged violation of Department Standards Directive:

26.2.25 Horseplay or Other Distracting Activity - Employees shall perform their duties in a conscientious manner and shall not engage in horseplay while on duty or at a Departmental or County facility or work station and shall not distract others who are performing assigned duties. *(Violation subject up to a 1 day suspension.)*

26.2.34 Failure to Follow Directive or Order - Employees shall adhere to all official Directives and/or orders, and shall faithfully execute all the duties and responsibilities of their assigned position. *(Violation subject up to a 5 day suspension.)*

26.2.41 Negligence Associated with Safety of Persons or Property - Employees shall be attentive to job duties and shall not violate official Directives, orders, supervisory instructions, or knowingly refrain and cause another to refrain from the performance of lawful duties required for the safety of persons or property. *(Violation subject up to a demotion.)*

26.2.97 Careless Handling of Equipment - Not Resulting in Damage/Loss - Employees shall utilize Department/County equipment for its intended purpose in accordance with established procedures and shall not use said equipment in a careless manner. *(Violation subject up to a 1 day suspension and/or loss or suspension of the equipment use privileges.)*

Volusia County Merit System Rules and Regulations 86-453 - *This violation may be sufficient grounds for disciplinary action ranging from oral reprimand to dismissal, depending on the seriousness of the offense and other circumstances related to the situation.*

RE: (2) Disregard for or frequent violations of Federal Laws, State laws, County ordinances, Departmental Standard Directives, and safety rules.

(5) Violation of any reasonable or official order, refusal to carry out lawful and reasonable directions given by a proper supervisor, or other acts of insubordination.

(13) Any conduct, on or off duty that reflects unfavorably on the County as an employer.

INVESTIGATIVE SUMMARY:

On September 20, 2016, Chief Deputy Eric J. Dietrich assigned the above incident to the Internal Affairs Unit. This report details the internal affairs investigation conducted by Investigator Glen Bennett.

On September 21, 2016, Investigator Bennett served Deputy Aaron Blais with a notice of internal investigation and officer bill of rights at the Volusia County Courthouse in Deland, FL.

On September 25, 2016, Investigator Bennett reviewed supervisor's inquiry 071M080.16, authored by Sergeant Robert Rohm a courthouse security supervisor at the Volusia County Courthouse (Deland Courthouse) in Deland, FL. Attached to the inquiry was a copy of the security video taken during the time and date the alleged incident was to have occurred.

According to the supervisor's inquiry, on September 9, 2016, Sergeant Rohm received information that Deputy Blais had gone through the Line Scan/X-ray security machine on the afternoon of September 8, 2016. Sergeant Rohm reviewed security video and confirmed that Deputy Blais, at approximately 3:31PM during normal operating hours, activated the Line

Scan/X-ray security machine, laid on his back and went through the machine feet first. Sergeant Rohm photographed a sticker, clearly visible on the Line Scan/X-ray security machine which states; ***“Caution: X-ray Hazard...Do not insert any part of your body into the tunnel when the system is energized.”***

Sergeant Rohm had a conversation about the incident with Sergeant Michael Campanella, another court security supervisor assigned to the Deland Courthouse. Sergeant Campanella recalled a conversation with Deputy Blais approximately two weeks prior when Deputy Blais mentioned his desire to go through the Line Scan/X-ray security machine. Sergeant Campanella pointed out the security camera system to Deputy Blais which is located at the security check point and instructed him not to do it.

Later that day on September 9, 2016, Sergeant Rohm received a call from Deputy Blais who began talking about how he had gone through the Line Scan/X-ray security machine and knew the incident was being discussed. Deputy Blais took full responsibility for his actions and expressed his curiosity about what it would be like to go through the machine. Sergeant Rohm informed Deputy Blais he was aware of the incident but could not discuss the matter since a supervisor’s inquiry had been started; however, Sergeant Rohm did express his concerns for Deputy Blais well-being due to the potential health implications from exposure to the radiation emitted by the machine.

Several days later on September 12, 2016, Deputy Blais approached Sergeant Rohm and said he acted alone and was solely responsible for the incident. Sergeant Rohm again informed Deputy Blais he was unable to discuss the incident any further.

Investigator Bennett reviewed the security footage from the day in question. Deputy Blais is identified in the video, along with Deputies, Chaves, B. Yackel and Clifton. Deputy Blais is seen sitting on the conveyor belt, then lays down and traverses the Line Scan/X-ray security machine feet first. Upon exiting the Line Scan/X-ray security machine, Deputy Blais walks over and appears to view the machines monitor. There were no civilians present in camera view; however, a few seconds after exiting the Line Scan/X-ray security machine, a civilian is seen walking past the deputies and out the front door.

Sergeant Robert Rohm

On September 28, 2016, Investigator Bennett and Sergeant Justin Sawicki conducted a sworn recorded interview with Sergeant Robert Rohm at the Deland Courthouse in Deland, FL. The following is a summary of that interview:

Sergeant Rohm has been with the Sheriff's Office for twenty-six years and is currently assigned to the Deland Courthouse as a court security supervisor. Sergeant Rohm is one of two court security supervisors who are responsible for approximately thirty deputies.

Sergeant Rohm received information that Deputy Blais, on Thursday, September 8, 2016, went through the Line Scan/X-ray security machine at the front door of the Deland Courthouse. Sergeant Rohm reviewed the security video and confirmed that Deputy Blais did in fact travel feet first through the Line Scan/X-ray security machine during operating hours. Sergeant Rohm described what he saw in the security video;

“Initially Deputy Blais looked inside the entrance portion of the X-ray machine, where you put the luggage or material or whatever items are going in. He looked in there. For whatever reason, I don't know and then he used his hand to activate the machine or energize the machine and what that does is it turns on the conveyor belt which also activates the X-ray portion of the machine because it's not always running and he then walked over to the conveyor belt, sat up on there and then put his feet down and slid through feet first and came out the other side.”

Upon exiting the Line Scan/X-ray security machine, it appeared to Sergeant Rohm that Deputy Blais walked over to the Line Scan/X-ray security machine's security monitor and viewed the image on the screen. Deputy Blais is then seen holding his personal cell phone up to the monitor. At which time Sergeant Rohm believed Deputy Blais may have photographed or videoed the image on the screen. After viewing the security video, Sergeant Rohm notified his immediate supervisor, Lieutenant Brian Barnard the Assistant Commander of Court Services, who directed him to conduct a supervisor's inquiry on the incident.

Sergeant Rohm was contacted by Deputy Blais the following day, Friday, September 9, 2016, in reference to the alleged incident. Sergeant Rohm never questioned Deputy Blais; however, Deputy Blais did voluntarily provide unsolicited information pertaining to his actions on the day in question, “... *I called him back later and he basically wanted to confess to me, what he did and let me know that he went through the machine...*” According to Sergeant Rohm, Deputy Blais, “...*admitted it wholeheartedly,*” to going through the Line Scan/X-ray security machine.

Later that day, Sergeant Rohm spoke to Sergeant Campanella about what occurred. Sergeant Campanella informed Sergeant Rohm that no more than two weeks prior, he spoke to Deputy Blais about not going through the Line Scan/X-ray security machine. According to Sergeant Rohm, Deputy Blais made the comment to Sergeant Campanella that he wanted to go through the Line Scan/X-ray security machine and Sergeant Campanella told him not to do it and reminded him of the security cameras.

Sergeant Rohm recalled another incident that occurred approximately two or three weeks prior when he was present with Deputy Blais at the front door security post. Deputy Blais had reached his hand in past the lead curtains to grab an object that had fallen out of the bucket while the Line Scan/X-ray security machine was energized. Sergeant Rohm remembered making a similar mistake and was told by another deputy not to do that while the machine was energized. After Sergeant Rohm told Deputy Blais, “*Hey don’t do that,*” Deputy Blais minimized the radiation hazard by telling Sergeant Rohm, “...*there’s not much radiation that’s exposed by doing that, it’s not that powerful. I said well you’re still not supposed to do it so don’t do it.*”

Deputies assigned to court services receive training from a field training officer (FTO) on how to properly perform their duties which includes procedures on how to properly operate the Line Scan/X-ray security machine. According to Sergeant Rohm, deputies are tested on identifying specific weapons and/or contraband that passes through the Line Scan/X-ray security machine as well as how to properly operate the machine. Sergeant Rohm was not sure whether there is specific instruction on the dangers of radiation exposure; however, he did point out, “...*there’s a sign pretty clearly posted on the front of it. Not to insert body parts while it’s energized is what I think it says.*”

Sergeant Michael Campanella

On September 28, 2016, Investigator Bennett and Sergeant Sawicki conducted a sworn recorded interview with Sergeant Michael Campanella at the Deland Courthouse in Deland, FL. The following is a summary of that interview:

Sergeant Campanella has been with the Sheriff's Office since 1996 and was promoted to sergeant approximately five years ago. Presently, Sergeant Campanella is one of two court security supervisors assigned to the Deland Courthouse and primarily serves as the bailiff supervisor.

Sergeant Campanella was aware of the incident that took place on Thursday, September 8, 2016, involving Deputy Blais. Approximately two weeks prior, he had a conversation with Deputy Blais at the front door of the Deland Courthouse in reference to going through the Line Scan/X-ray security machine. Sergeant Campanella described the conversation with Deputy Blais;

"...he made mention that he was gonna put himself through the X-ray machine... I said Aaron I don't want to hear that. I don't want to know anything about that and then he said no really and then I obviously realized he wasn't joking. And I said, don't do that. I said, I'm telling you don't do that, and don't forget even if you think you're gonna do it, it's gonna be on video."

Sergeant Campanella believed Deputy Blais laughed off his directions to not go through the Line Scan/X-ray security machine because when it was initially mentioned, Sergeant Campanella laughed because he didn't believe he was serious. *"...and in all fairness my first initial reaction to him was because I thought he was joking. I said, I don't want to know about that. I don't want to hear about it. I don't want to know."* However, realizing that Deputy Blais was serious, Sergeant Campanella told him, *"Don't go through there [X-ray machine]. I said, don't do it."* When Sergeant Campanella was asked if he considered his direction an "order" he replied, *"At that point in time I considered that an order. Yes. I do. I told him, don't do it."*

Sergeant Campanella explained that the obvious risk of going through the Line Scan/X-ray security machine was the exposure to radiation; however, his secondary concern was the potential damage to the machine itself. The Line Scan/X-ray security machine goes through a

calibration and certification process and is covered under a service contract, “...they [Line Scan/X-ray security machines] are covered for certain things and certain things aren’t covered so him going through that would, and if it broke, would not be covered under the service contract.”

Outlined in the operation manual, next to a warning symbol it states: ***Never allow anyone to ride the conveyor belt. Be aware of the normal mechanical hazards of moving conveyor components at both ends of the Conveyor System.*** According to Sergeant Campanella, the manual is kept in the sergeant’s office, which is not readily accessible to the deputies assigned to the Line Scan/X-ray security machine; however, it is available upon request.

Deputy Danny Clifton

On September 29, 2016, Investigator Bennett and Sergeant Sawicki conducted a sworn recorded interview with Deputy Danny Clifton at the Sheriff’s administrative offices in Deland, FL. The following is a summary of that interview:

Deputy Clifton has been in law enforcement for twenty-seven years and has spent the last fourteen with the Sheriff’s Office. He is assigned to the Agriculture Crimes Unit and often works overtime at the various courthouses. Deputy Clifton was on duty at the Deland Courthouse working security at the front entrance on Thursday, September 8, 2016.

Deputy Clifton was present at the front door of the Deland Courthouse with Deputies Yackel, Blais, and Chaves and recalled Deputy Blais talking about going through the Line Scan/X-ray security machine. Deputy Clifton believed it to be just talk until he observed Deputy Blais actually put his body through the Line Scan/X-ray machine, “...I was standing there when he [Deputy Blais] got on the machine and ran his body through the X-ray machine.”

Upon exiting the Line Scan/X-ray security machine, Deputy Clifton along with the other deputies looked at the Line Scan/X-ray security machine monitor. According to Deputy Clifton, Deputy Blais either videotaped or photographed the images on the monitor using his personal cell phone.

Deputy Clifton also made mention of the warning stickers positioned at either end of the Line Scan/X-ray security machine.

Deputy Bradford Yackel

On October 13, 2016, Investigator Bennett and Sergeant Sawicki conducted a sworn recorded interview with Deputy Bradford Yackel at the Sheriff's Office Ormond beach District-3 headquarters. The following is a summary of that interview:

Deputy Yackel has been with the Sheriff's Office for approximately sixteen years and presently is assigned to the Sheriff's Office Traffic Unit. Deputy Yackel frequently works overtime at the courthouses and received training on how to operate the Line Scan/X-ray security machine.

Deputy Yackel was on duty Thursday, September 8, 2016, and recalled the incident involving Deputy Blais;

"I recall him hitting the start button himself, walking in front of me. I was sitting down at the time. He hops up on the X-ray machine after he made a quick look nobody was coming. Jumped on the machine and rode through the machine. I believe it was feet first too. If I recall."

Deputy Yackel did not remember if any of the deputies on scene told him "not to do it" or "it wasn't a good idea;" however, Deputy Yackel did say to Deputy Blais, *"I did call him a "Fuckin moron" when he got done."* Deputy Yackel pointed out that there are warning labels on the machine, warning you not to expose any body part to the X-ray and, *"...it's more or less common sense."*

Deputy Christina Chaves

On October 14, 2016, Investigator Bennett conducted a sworn recorded interview with Deputy Christina Chaves at the Deland Courthouse in Deland, FL. The following is a summary of that interview:

Deputy Chaves has been in law enforcement for approximately twenty five years and with the Sheriff's Office for the last thirteen. She is currently assigned to the Judicial Services Division as a bailiff to Judge Elizabeth Blackburn. Deputy Chaves often works front door security when court is not in session.

Deputy Chaves was working Thursday, September 8, 2016, and was assigned to front door security when Deputy Blais went through the Line Scan/X-ray security machine. Deputy Chaves recalled Deputy Blais placing himself on the conveyor belt and going through feet first. After going through the Line Scan/X-ray security machine, Deputy Chaves recalled Deputy Blais saying, *“He, he indicated later that he was interested to see what the scan would show as far as what a person’s body would show on a scan.”*

Deputy Chaves received training on how to operate the Line Scan/X-ray security machine but did not recall any specific training or information on the seriousness of being exposed to radiation. Deputy Chaves recalled seeing the warning labels on the Line Scan/X-ray security machine but could not remember what they said. Deputy Chaves was asked if she needed training to know not to put herself through an X-ray machine or if she needed a warning label to advise her not to put her hand in radiation and she replied, *“No...Do not.”*

Deputy Aaron Blais

On October 20, 2016, Investigator Bennett and Sergeant Sawicki conducted a sworn recorded interview with Deputy Aaron Blais at the Sheriff’s administrative offices in Deland, FL. The following is a summary of that interview:

Deputy Blais has been with the Sheriff’s Office since 2005 and is assigned to the Judicial Services Division. He received training at his current position including the Line Scan/X-ray security machine.

Deputy Blais was aware the Line Scan/X-ray security machine is used to X-ray items to identify potential weapons from entering the courthouse. He said he was unaware of the warning lights and labels located on the Line Scan/X-ray security machine prior to the incident; however, he did take note of them after.

Deputy Blais recalled being assigned to front door security at the Deland Courthouse Thursday, September 8, 2016 at approximately 3:30PM. Deputy Blais acknowledged that he laid down on the X-ray machine conveyor belt and went feet first through the Line Scan/X-ray security machine.

According to Deputy Blais, he was warned one time by Sergeant Rohm about not placing his hand inside the Line Scan/X-ray security machine while it was energized, *“I wasn’t given a direct order uh it was more of a warning because I was trying to get a hat that had fallen out...”* Not long after he was warned by Sergeant Rohm, another item had fallen out and he inadvertently reached in again and grabbed it but Sergeant Rohm never said anything. Deputy Blais went on saying, *“Throughout my training nobody said don’t stick your arm in there when it’s energized. I didn’t have; I didn’t read any manuals. I didn’t see any directives that stated that either so.”* Deputy Blais acknowledged he was aware of the international sign for radiation and why the Line Scan/X-ray security machine had lead curtains around it.

The following day, Friday, September 9, 2016, Deputy Blais contacted Sergeant Rohm and admitted that he had gone through the Line Scan/X-ray security machine.

Approximately two weeks prior, Deputy Blais and Sergeant Campanella had a conversation where Sergeant Campanella reportedly told him not to go through the Line Scan/X-ray security machine and further reminded him of the security cameras. Deputy Blais recalled the conversation and stated, *“I remember me and him having a conversation. That is not how it went.”*

Deputy Blais described the conversation between him and Sergeant Campanella;

“We’re all at the front tower [front door security] talking. A couple jokes being cracked and me and him were set off to the side over by the exit doors and I said hey, basically have you ever thought about going through the X-ray machine? I think it would be hilarious. I’m also curious on what the picture would look like and see what you could do with it to see exactly what you could see in the human body. What it would look like. He [Sergeant Campanella] said that he thought it would be hilarious. He said but there’s cameras. Keep in mind it’ll be on video. To which I basically stated well I’m not gonna do it with you guys here or anything like that you know. That doesn’t give you plausible deniability and he was like it would be hilarious though. And he walked away. And that was it. There was no, “Don’t do that” “Don’t, I’m telling you don’t do that.” There was none of that.”

Deputy Blais was asked if he thought it was safe to expose himself to radiation and he replied, *“No. It was stupid. Period. Not here to try and make excuses for it. Bottom line it was a stupid mistake.”* He said he was curious ever since he was assigned to the courthouse. He had heard stories about the capabilities of the machine and wondered what his body would look like on the monitor. He wondered if he would be able to see his bodily organs or veins running through his body. Deputy Blais was asked if he ever had an X-ray taken at a doctor’s office and he replied, *“Oh yeah,”* and if the doctor or technician covered him in a lead blanket or even went behind a wall when they took the X-ray and he stated, *“Yes,”* acknowledging there was a reason for it.

Deputy Blais conducted his own independent research on the amount of radiation he would be exposed to. Deputy Blais explained, *“I Googled it. I looked at a couple of things about stationary luggage X-ray machines.”*

Deputy Blais took full responsibility for his actions, stating;

“First off, I apologize that this created work for you guys um I apologize about that. Uh, secondly, I understand now that it might not be as funny as it first appeared. However I did learn something out of the event and I alone bear full responsibility and accept full responsibility for my actions. My idea. My actions. My, my fault. My responsibility. Um, so basically that’s about it you know it is what it is and what’s gonna happen I’m willing to accept my punishment as a man so...This mistake will not happen again. Trust me.”

When asked if he felt he violated the following policies, Deputy Blais stated:

26.2.25 Horseplay or Other Distracting Activity	NO
26.2.34 Failure to Follow Directive or Order	NO
26.2.41 Negligence Associated with Safety of Persons or Property	NO
26.2.97 Careless Handling of Equipment - Not Resulting in Damage/Loss	YES
Volusia County Merit System Rules and Regulations 86-453 (2)	NO
Volusia County Merit System Rules and Regulations 86-453 (5)	NO
Volusia County Merit System Rules and Regulations 86-453 (13)	NO

CONCLUSION:

On November 8, 2016, this investigation was presented to the Sheriff and his administrative staff. After review, the Sheriff determined the violation of the below listed Department Standards Directive to be:

26.2.25 Horseplay or Other Distracting Activity	Sustained
26.2.34 Failure to Follow Directive or Order	Sustained
26.2.41 Negligence Associated with Safety of Persons or Property	Sustained
26.2.97 Careless Handling of Equipment - Not Resulting in Damage/Loss	Sustained
Volusia County Merit System Rules and Regulations 86-453 (2)	Sustained
Volusia County Merit System Rules and Regulations 86-453 (5)	Sustained
Volusia County Merit System Rules and Regulations 86-453 (13)	Sustained

On November 10, 2016, Investigator Bennett served Deputy Blais with an Intent to Suspend letter at the Deland Courthouse in Deland, FL.

On November 30, 2016, Investigator Bennett served Deputy Blais with a Final Suspension letter at the Deland Courthouse in Deland, FL. Deputy Blais was ordered to serve an eight hour suspension without pay on December 9, 2016.

EXHIBITS:

- A. Report of Investigation
- B. Advisement of Administrative Oath/Perjury Warning/Garrity Warning
- C. Official Correspondence/Supervisors Inquiry
- D. Official Transcript of Sergeant Robert Rohm
- E. Official Transcript of Sergeant Michael Campanella
- F. Official Transcript of Deputy Danny Clifton
- G. Official Transcript of Deputy Bradford Yackel
- H. Official Transcript of Deputy Christina Chaves
- I. Official Transcript of Deputy Aaron Blais
- J. Miscellaneous Documents
- K. Digital Media

Witnesses

Sergeant Robert Rohm
Volusia County Sheriff's Office
386-736-5961

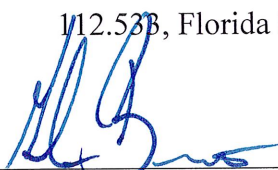
Sergeant Michael Campanella
Volusia County Sheriff's Office
386-736-5961

Deputy Danny Clifton
Volusia County Sheriff's Office
386-736-5961

Deputy Bradford Yackel
Volusia County Sheriff's Office
386-736-5961

Deputy Christina Chaves
Volusia County Sheriff's Office
386-736-5961

I, the undersigned, do hereby swear, under the penalty of perjury, that, to the best of my personal knowledge, information, and belief, I have not knowingly or willfully deprived, or allowed another to deprive, the suspect of the investigation of any rights contained in ss. 112.532 and 112.533, Florida Statutes.

INVESTIGATOR:  DATE: 12/1/10

**Investigator Glen Bennett
Internal Affairs Investigator**

APPROVED BY:  DATE: 12/1/10

**Chief Deputy Eric J. Dietrich
SHERIFF BEN F. JOHNSON
VOLUSIA COUNTY FLORIDA**